DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 343 CG 021 919

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TITLE Satisfaction with Subordinates in the Workplace.
PUB DATE May 89
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (61st, Chicago, IL, May 4-6, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Banking; *Employees; *Employer Employee Relationship; Interpersonal Relationship; *Job Satisfaction; *Supervisors

ABSTRACT

In research on job satisfaction and on supervisor/subordinate relationships, there has been a focus on subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors. In contrast, this study examined supervisor satisfaction with subordinates. Subjects (N=58) were bank supervisors attending a training program. Supervisors completed questionnaires on themselves and on their subordinates. The subordinates' questionnaires measured the functional relationship and included subscales on loyalty, cooperation, conscientiousness, willingness to work hard, follow-through, ability to think for oneself, taking and giving suggestions, honesty, and interest in the work. Entity relationships measured included biological, background, and value differences. Satisfaction with employees was measured using five questions worded positively or negatively. The results indicated that if subordinates did things in such a way as to help the supervisor reach his goals (high on functional relationship), the supervisor's satisfaction with subordinates appeared to be enhanced. The effects of entity relationship differences were not based solely on biological or other background differences, but the perceived value differences had an important effect on reported satisfaction with subordinates. Functional relationships were important in the development of supervisors' satisfaction with their subordinates even after the effects of entity relationships were taken into consideration. (ABL)

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ED310343

Satisfaction with Subordinates in the Workplace

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, May 1989, Chicago.

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Satisfaction with Subordinates in the Workplace

A great deal of research has done both on job satisfaction and on supervisor/subordinate relationships. When considered in combination, there has been a focus on subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors. This paper studies the topic from a new perspective, however, that of supervisor satisfaction with subordinates.

Supervisors, co-workers and other people in the workplace generally have been accepted as important facets of job satisfaction. This is evidencef by their inclusion as two of the five scales on Smith, Kendall and Hulin's (1964) Job Descriptive Index, considered one of the most reliable and valid measures of job satisfaction (Carroll, 1973). Further support is found in Carroll's 1973 review of numerous studies establishing the importance of the supervisor as a facet of subordinate satisfaction, in Katz and VanMaanen's (1977) grouping of co-workers, supervisors and other people into one of their three "loci of work satisfaction," and in Khaleque and Rahman's (1987) finding that personal relationships, in general, are a major factor in overall satisfaction.

If the "people" aspect of job satisfaction is important to workers in general, then it stands to reason that it will be an important factor in supervisors' job satisfaction. Supervisors nearly always have a larger number of immediate subordinates than they have supervisors (classical organization structures result in only one supervisor per subordinate, but several subordinates per supervisor). For supervisors, therefore, it is possible that subordinates are a major component of the "people" aspect of their jobs. Therefore it makes sense to examine possible factors affecting supervisors' satisfaction their subordinates.

Finally, Wernimont (1971) has suggested that to promote supervisor and subordinate satisfaction, supervisor expections should be clearly communicated to subordinates. When subordinates are aware of supervisor expectations, subordinates can behave in such a way as to meet those expectations and, thus, satisfy the supervisor. However, an important first step is to examine what supervisors expect of their subordinates. Only when supervisors' expectations and what makes them satisfied with subordinates is understood, can this information be communicated to subordinates.

There are two types of possible relationships that may affect supervisor satisfaction with subordinates. These are functional relationships and entity relationships (Locke, 1976). Functional relationships are based on an exchange of services or materials; people are value facilitators for each other. Functional relationships may explain supervisor attitude toward subordinates. If the subordinate facilitates in the supervisor's attempt to reach the supervisor's goals, the subordinate will be positively viewed by the supervisor.

Wernimont (1971), in open ended interviews with supervisory and non-supervisory employees, developed a list of sixty-one functional subordinate behaviors (although he did not use the phrase "functional relationship"). Even though Wernimont's study lacked scientific rigor, it does present a begining for future research on functional relationships. He identified expected behaviors that were named frequently by the supervisors in his study. These behaviors included loyalty to the supervisor, willingness to work hard, respect for the supervisor, cooperation, conscientiousness, meeting of deadlines, interest in the work, taking and giving suggestions, honesty, competence, qualifications for the job, follow through on tasks, thinking for oneself,

communication, and keeping the supervisor informed.

Entity relationships in the work place are based on liking people for what they are instead of for what they do for each other (Locke, 1976). The role of shared values between supervisor and subordinates is the basis of these entity relationships. Kemelgor (1982) found that subordinates who were highly satisfied with their supervisors had value structures more similar to their supervisors than those subordinates who were less satisfied. The inverse could also be true. That is, supervisors will be more satisfied with subordinates who have value structures similar to their own than with subordinates who have less similar value structures.

Finally, it has been suggested that the presence of both functional and entity relationships will result in higher levels of satisfaction than if only one type of relationship is present (Locke, 1976).

This study, in an attempt to examine supervisor satisfaction with subordinates, used the two types of relationships proposed by Locke as a framework. Entity relationships were measured by the similarity of supervisor/subordinate demographics and values, while functional relationships were measured by work-related activities that might be helpful to the supervisor.

METHOD

Subjects

Fifty-eight bank supervisors attending a bank training program at a medium-sized Midwestern university participated in the present study. The supervisors were from several different banks in the Midwest area. Fifty-nine supervisors attended the program, one of whom stated that he did not have subordinates reporting to him at that time. This subject was not asked to

participate in this study. The response rate of the remaining subjects was 100%.

Participants ranged in age from 24 to 56 years and included 18 males and 38 females. Subordinates consisted of 24 males and 144 females, ranging in age from 17 to 60 years.

Procedure

At the begining of the final program class the final examination for the course), the senior author, with the agreement of the director of the banking school, asked the program participants to participate in the present study. The study was briefly explained and anonymity was assured. All three authors then waited at the front of the classroom for the supervisors to complete their final examination in the banking course. At this time, the authors individually asked the supervisors to participate in the study. If the supervisor agreed to participate, they were given a sheet of paper on which they were instructed to write the initials of the names of all subordinates who reported directly to them. Three subordinates were randomly chosen by the authors, using a table of random numbers.

The supervisor was then instructed to complete a "Subordinate Questionaire" with reference to the three subordinates chosen by the authors. If the supervisor had three or fewer subordinates then the supervisor was instructed to complete the Subordinate Questionaire for those subordinates.

The questionnaires were presented to the supervisors in manila file folders containing instructions stapled to the inside front cover, one questionnaire for each of the three randomly chosen subordinates, and one supervisor questionnaire. In addition to havin a different title and separate instructions, the supervisor questionnaire had been copied on green paper to set it

apart from the subordinate questionnaires, and the researchers pointed out the differences to the participants individually. Each of the questionaires in a single folder was stamped with a number to be used to identify subordinates with their supervisors. No names were obtained of either supervisors or subordinates.

One half of the supervisors received questionaire folders which contained the Supervisor Questionaire as the first questionaire, while the other half of the supervisors received folders in which the Supervisor Questionaire was placed last. This procedure was designed as a test of the influence of questionnaire order on the obtained results.

Measures

Functional relationships. Twenty-seven of the questions on the "Opinions about Subordinate" section of the questionaire were developed to measure functional relationship (FR). Developed from the nine most frequently listed supervisor expectations of subordinates from Wernimont's (1971) study, three questions, two positive and one negative, were written to measure these nine functional relationships. Question order on this section was determined by first using random numbers and then separating any items which were similar in wording or concept.

Nine subscales were formed, one for each expectation, and these nine scores were also combined to form a summary FR score. The functional relationships subscales were loyalty to the supervisor (mean 5.45, SD 1.09, alpha .75), cooperation (mean 5.38, SD 1.28, alpha .80), conscientiousness (mean 5.55, SD 1.15, alpha .73), wilingness to work hard (mean 5.61, SD 1.21, alpha .84), follow-through (mean 5.44, SD 1.15, alpha .80), ability to think for oneself (mean 4.93, SD 1.26, alpha .77), taking and giving suggestions (mean 4.77, SD 1.28, alpha .72), honesty (mean

5.33, SD 1.13, alpha .69), and interest in the work (mean 4.86, SD 1.26, alpha .68). The mean summary functional relationship score was 5.26 with a standard deviation of .97.

Entity relationships. Entity relationships (ER) included biological, background, and value differences between supervisors and subordinates. Questions measuring the demographics (Subordinate and Supervisor Demographics sections of the questionnaire) were developed specifically for this study. Questions developed to measure perceived values (Subordinate and Supervisor Values sections of the questionnaires) were partially derived from Fiedler's (1964) LPC index. The LPC directions were changed by omitting any mention of the least preferred co-worker. Instead, supervisors were asked to rate their subordinates and themselves (in the appropriate section of the questionnaires) on each of the bi-polar adjectives. In addition to the items adapted from the LPC, four more bi-polar adjectives were developed and added to the questionnaire (i.e., honest-dishonest, flexible-inflexible, illogical-logical, and curious-indifferent). These were suggested in Wernimont's (1971) study.

Supervisor-subordinate differences were computed as the absolute differences on parallel measures. The mean of all demographic differences was 1.48 with a standard deviation of 1.09, and the mean of all value differences was .85 with a standard deviation of .83.

Satisfaction with subordinates. Satisfaction with subordinates (SS) was measured by five questions (mean 5.21, SD 1.38, alpha .92), three of which were worded positively and two negatively. These questions were randomly distributed in the functional relationships section of the Subordinate Questionnaire. The items were "overall, I am very pleased to have this person

work for me," "I would be more content with my job if this person did not work here," "I am more satisfied with this person than almost anyone who has ever worked for me," "all in all, I am very satisfied with this person as my subordinate," and "all in all, I would rather have someone else working for me," answered on a seven-point, strongly agree-to-strongly disagree scale.

Analyses

Correlations were computed between satisfaction with subordinates (SS) and the nine seperate functional relationship indices, as well as the overall FR summary index. Correlations were also computed between SS and the summary index of absolute demographic differences, the summary index of absolute value differences, and the overall ER summary index.

Moderated multiple regressions were computed with the both the overall FR and ER summary indices and their interaction, in order to test for possible interaction effects of the two types of relationships on satisfaction with subordinates.

Finally, satisfaction with subordinates was hierarchically regressed on entity and functional relationships. The relationship variables were entered into the regression equation based on judgments about the order in which such variables are most likely to develop over an individual's lifetime: (1) biological differences--age, race, and sex; (2) education differences; (3) marital status and employment status differences--full or part-time; (4) organizational membership and political activity differences; (5) value differences; and (6) the nine seperate functional relationships.

RESULTS

The effects of functional and entity relationships on satisfaction with subordinates was first examined by correlating

each subordinate's nine functional relationships, the overall FR summary score, and the overall ER summary score with his or her SS score (Table 1). Each of the nine functional relationships indices, the overall FR summary score, and the overall ER summary score were strongly related to satisfaction with subordinates.

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition to the overall ER score, the absolute demographic differences and absolute value differences were correlated with SS. Demographic differences were not significantly related to SS ($r = .15$, ns), but value differences were related to SS ($r = -.67$, $p < .01$).

The moderated multiple regression of satisfaction with subordinates on summary functional and entity relationships is in Table 2. The summary entity relationship index, when entered first into the regression, accounted for nine percent of the variance in satisfaction with subordinates. The summary functional relationship index accounted for 29 percent of the variance in SS. There was no interaction effect.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 contains the results of the hierarchical regression in which the different types of supervisor-subordinate relationships were entered based on their presumed developmental sequence. In order, among the entity relationships, only the absolute value differences were significant ($p < .00$). The nine functional relationships, when entered in one block, were significant ($p < .00$). The overall combination of the separate

entity and functional relationships had a very strong effect on satisfaction with subordinates.

Insert Table 3 about here

T-tests of differences between the order of the questionnaires were also computed. Four functional relationships differed significantly ($p < .05$), with those supervisors who received the Supervisor Questionnaire first reporting higher scores for all four relationships than those who received the Supervisor Questionnaire last. These four functional relationships, with means of supervisors who received the Supervisor Questionnaire first listed first, were, loyalty (means 5.70 and 5.20), cooperation (means 5.60 and 5.17), conscientiousness (means 5.74 and 5.36), and honesty (means 5.51 and 5.16).

DISCUSSION

These results support the hypotheses about the potential determinants of satisfaction with subordinates that were developed from Locke's (1976) discussion of functional and entity relationships. If subordinates are similar to supervisors (and therefore, probably high on ER) or if they do things in such a way as to help the supervisor reach his or her goals (i.e. high on FR), the supervisor's satisfaction with subordinates appears to be enhanced.

Wernimont's (1971) list of supervisor expectations of subordinates proved useful in devising measures of functional relationships. Both correlations and multiple regressions supported this conclusion. This suggests that future research on satisfaction with subordinates could continue to go in this

direction.

It also implies that the supervisor's expectations of subordinates are theoretically linked to his or her satisfaction with them, because Wernimont's study was concerned with these expectations. Role theory (e.g., Sarbin & Allen, 1969) defines jobs in terms of expectations of supervisors (and others), and therefore, some use of this theory in developing future research on functional relationships as precursors of satisfaction with subordinates may prove beneficial.

An important finding is that the effects of entity relationship differences were not based solely on biological or other background differences. The perceived value differences between supervisors and subordinates had an important effect on reported satisfaction with subordinates. It may be that values are more important to supervisors than more "superficial" features of subordinates.

Another major conclusion of the present study was the effect of functional relationships on SS. Functional relationships were important in the development of supervisors' satisfaction with their subordinates even after the effects of entity relationships were taken into consideration. These functional relationships were not the same as subordinate performance, although they were that in part. Instead, they were ways that the subordinate behaved might be preferred and expected (Wernimont's language; 1971) by supervisors. It is not only strictly defined job performance that supervisors want of their subordinates; such things a loyalty to the supervisor, for example, may be instrumental to the supervisor without necessarily being job performance as the company would define it.

Loyalty to the supervisor can even be poor job performance if

it entails extremes such as covering up the bosses' wrong-doing, for example. Nevertheless, the strong effect of functional relationships reinforces the image of the workplace as a place where instrumentality prevails in relationships. Subordinate behavior that is instrumental or functional from the supervisor's point of view is appreciated even more than having a subordinate who is a certain type of person (e.g., similar to the supervisor, as in entity relationships).

Recommendations for Further Research

An important consideration for future research is the relationship between functional relationships and subordinate performance (both objective performance and supervisors' ratings of subordinate performance on well designed performance appraisal scales). While functional relationships might include more objective subordinate performance, they are not identical conceptually.

Entity relationships, on the other hand, obviously do not include subordinate performance. Entity relationships, as well as non-performance elements of functional relationships, may be potential contaminants of supervisors' performance appraisals. Tusi and Barry (1986) and Hogan (1987) found evidence that affective responses of raters to ratees create bias in performance ratings. Thus, the relationship between entity and functional relationships and performance ratings is an important research question.

It would also be interesting to examine potential moderating effects of supervisor characteristics on the relationships between specific FR's or ER's and satisfaction with subordinates. It may be that some variables is stronger determinants of SS for some supervisors than for others. Individual differences among

supervisors is a potentially fruitful area of future research. Supervisors' characteristics that might moderate these relationships include both individual characteristics such as personality, and job characteristics such as the responsibilities of the supervisors' organizational positions.

The role of satisfaction with subordinates in relation to other facets of supervisor job satisfaction also needs to be examined. This line of research would include exploring the relative contribution of SS and satisfaction with other facets of a supervisor's work life to overall job satisfaction and to outcomes such as turnover.

A second line of future research regarding satisfaction with subordinates concerns the reasons that satisfaction with subordinates might be an important form of satisfaction for supervisors. It seems likely that this facet of satisfaction will not be equally important to all supervisors. For some, it could be very unimportant, while it could be extremely important others. For example, it might be hypothesized that satisfaction with subordinates would contribute more strongly to overall job satisfaction for supervisors who have very little formal power over their subordinates, while it might contribute only weakly or not at all to the overall job satisfaction of supervisors who have a great deal of power over them. In the former case, the supervisor may at times feel at the mercy of his or her subordinates who are a reflection on him or her but over whom little control can be exerted.

Finally, research designed to address satisfaction with subordinates may aid in the understanding of supervisor behaviors toward subordinates. Leana (1986) found that the perceptions a supervisor has of subordinates' capability, responsibility, and

trustworthiness was more important in determining the degree of delegation on the part of the supervisor than more objective performance measures. Future research on behaviors of supervisors toward their subordinates may benefit from the inclusion of specific measures of satisfaction with subordinates.

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Table 1
Correlations

	DEM DIFF	VAL DIFF	L	CO	C	W	F	A	T	H	I	ER	FR	SS
DEM DIFF	1.00													
VAL DIFF	-.16*	1.00												
L	.13*	-.51**	1.00											
CO	.11	-.66**	.65**	1.00										
C	.07	-.40**	.62**	.69**	1.00									
W	.07	-.47**	.56**	.67**	.83**	1.00								
F	.05	-.40**	.55**	.64**	.81**	.74**	1.00							
A	.10	-.48**	.41**	.60**	.63**	.63**	.61**	1.00						
T	.08	-.65**	.53**	.72**	.51**	.51**	.52**	.63**	1.00					
H	.09	-.47**	.69**	.64**	.63**	.57**	.55**	.37**	.56**	1.00				
I	.15*	-.51**	.58**	.71**	.66**	.66**	.60**	.49**	.59**	.55**	1.00			
ER	.76**	.51**	.20**	-.32**	-.20*	-.24**	-.22*	-.22*	-.35**	-.23*	-.20*	1.00		
FR	.12	-.63**	.76**	.87**	.87**	.85**	.82**	.74**	.78**	.76**	.81**	-.30**	1.00	
SS	.15*	-.67**	.71**	.78**	.70**	.67**	.66**	.58**	.67**	.67**	.68**	-.30**	.84**	1.00

**$p < .001$
*$p < .05$

Key

DEM DIFF = demographic difference score (standardized)
VAL DIFF = value difference score (standardized)
L = loyalty to the supervisor
CO = cooperation
C = conscientiousness
W = willingness to work
F = follow through
A = ability to think for oneself
T = taking and giving suggestions
H = honesty
I = interest in the work
ER = entity relationship
FR = functional relationship
SS = satisfaction with subordinate

Table 2

Regression Analysis

Step	Variable Entered	F to Enter	R Squared Change	Multiple R	Overall F
1	ER		.09	.30	
	FR		.62	.84	205.12
2	Combination		-.22	.63	111.14

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Step	Variables Entered	R Squared Change	Multiple R	Overall F
1	ABSEX ABRACE ABAGE		.14	1.08
2	ABEDVC	.001	.14	.85
3	ABMARST ABEMPST	.01	.18	.92
4	ABPOLINV ABORGINV	.005	.20	.80
5	ABVAL	.44*	.69	16.03*
6	FOLLOW HONESTY THINKFO INTEREST LOYALTY SUGGEST WORKHARD COOP CONSC	.29*	.88	27.38*

* $p < .01$